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Boat arrivals in Australia: a quick guide to the statistics

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This quick guide provides statistics on the number of asylum seekers that have arrived by boat in Australia since 1976 when the first wave of boats carrying people seeking asylum from the aftermath of the Vietnam War began to arrive.

It reproduces and updates the appendices of a more detailed Parliamentary Library research paper, [Boat arrivals in Australia since 1976](#). The full research paper includes an overview of the historical and political context surrounding the arrival of asylum seekers by boat, details of Australian government policy responses since 1976, and trends in public opinion.

It is important to note that, while every effort has been made to ensure consistency, the statistics provided in this guide have been compiled by Parliamentary Library staff over a period of many years from a variety of sources.

For example, since 2008 our financial year figures have been compiled from ministerial or departmental media releases and transcripts. As not all media releases specify the number of crew members versus passengers, and some boat arrivals may not be subject to ministerial or departmental media releases at all, these figures may differ slightly from other sources. While we are confident our financial year figures accurately reflect available Government data, due to the inconsistency of the sources over the years these figures should be regarded as an estimate.

However, our calendar year figures since 2009 have been compiled from a single source—regular advice provided to the Parliamentary Library by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. As a result, we can have confidence in the consistency and accuracy of that data.

Statistics in this guide include:

[Table 1: Boat arrivals since 1976 by calendar year](#)

[Table 2: Boat arrivals since 1976 by financial year](#)

[Graph 1: Boat arrivals by calendar year since 1979 and financial year since 1989-90](#)

Table 1: Boat arrivals since 1976 by calendar year

Year	Number of boats	Number of people
1976		111
1977		868
1978		746
1979		304
1980		0
1981		30
1982–88		0
Year	Number of boats	Number of people (excludes crew)
1989	1	26
1990	2	198
1991	6	214
1992	6	216
1993	3	81
1994	18	953
1995	7	237
1996	19	660
1997	11	339
1998	17	200
1999	86	3721
2000	51	2939
2001	43	5516
2002	1	1
2003	1	53
2004	1	15
2005	4	11
2006	6	60
2007	5	148
2008	7	161

Year	Number of boats	Crew	Number of people (excludes crew)
2009	60	141	2726
2010	134	345	6555
2011	69	168	4565
2012	278	392	17 204
2013	300	644	20 587
2014 (to 17.1.14)	0	0	0

Sources:

- **1976–1988:** K Betts, '[Boatpeople and public opinion in Australia](#)', *People and place*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2001, p. 34. Numbers of boats and crew members not specified.
- **1989–2008:** Department of Immigration advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 22 June 2009 (excludes crew members).
- **2009–2014:** Customs and Border Protection advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 17 January 2014.

Table 2: Boat arrivals since 1976 by financial year

Year	Number of boats	Number of people
1975–76	1	5
1976–77	7	204
1977–78	43	1423
1978–79	6	351
1979–80	2	56
1980–81	1	30
1981–82 to 1988–89	0	0
1989–90	3	224
1990–91	5	158
1991–92	3	78
1992–93	4	194
1993–94	6	194
1994–95	21	1071
1995–96	14	589
1996–97	13	365
1997–98	13	157
1998–99	42	921
1999–00	75	4175
2000–01	54	4137
2001–02	19	3039
2002–03	0	0
2003–04	3	82
2004–05	0	0
2005–06	8	61
2006–07	4	133
2007–08	3	25

Year	Number of boats*	Number of people (excludes crew)*	Number of people (includes crew)**
2008–09	23	985	1033
2009–10	117	5327	5609
2010–11	89	4730	4940

Year	Number of boats	Crew	Number of people (excludes crew)
2011–12	110	190	7983
2012–13	403	423	25 173
2013–14 (to 31.12.13)	104	198	7474

Notes:

- Data from 2001–02 onwards includes arrivals at both excised and non-excised places, but excludes boats returned from whence they came (boat turnarounds).
- Deaths at sea in Australian waters may or may not be included in the figures provided by the Department of Immigration, but are included in figures compiled by the authors. Deaths include 5 deceased at sea 16 April 2009; 12 deceased at sea 1 November 2009; 1 crew member who allegedly drowned on 20 November 2011; and the

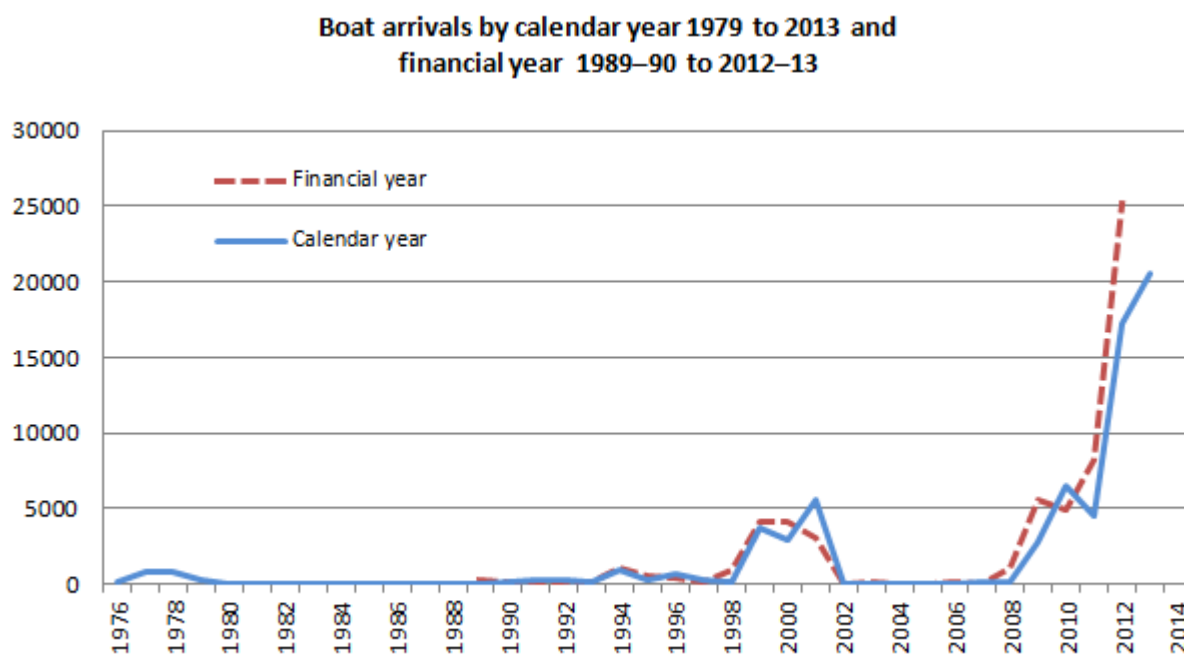
estimated 48 who drowned during the boat tragedy on 15 December 2010 where a boat sank on approach to Christmas Island (42 people were rescued, 30 bodies were recovered and an estimated 18 people drowned). For further details see M Hutton, [Drownings on the public record of people attempting to enter Australia irregularly by boat since 1998](#), sievx.com website, accessed 21 January 2014,

- Arrival figures do not include; two arrivals in an 'esky' on 17 January 2009; four on Deliverance Island with no boat on 29 April 2009; and 78 on board MV *Oceanic Viking* intercepted in Indonesian waters in November 2009.

Sources:

- **1975–76 to 2007–08:** Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), [Submission](#) to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Immigration Detention Network inquiry (no. 32), Figure 2, p. 18, 1 September 2011, accessed 21 January 2014. Numbers of crew members not specified or not included.
- **2008–09 to 2010–11:** *Ibid. (excludes crew members); and **figures compiled from ministerial and departmental press releases (includes crew members).
- **2011–12:** figures compiled from ministerial and departmental press releases. Figures include 10 Chinese asylum seekers attempting to travel to NZ by boat in April 2012 who were taken to Darwin after making a distress call and the 18 deceased recovered midway between Christmas Island and Indonesia by Australia search and rescue vessels on 21 and 27 June 2012.
- **2012–13:** figures compiled from ministerial and departmental press releases. Figures include: 1 deceased on board a vessel which arrived on 15 November 2012; 2 deceased recovered from a vessel which capsized on 25 March; and 9 deceased confirmed, but not recovered from the water, from a vessel which capsized on 7 June 2013.
- **2013–14:** figures compiled from ministerial and departmental press releases. Figures include: 1 deceased infant male recovered from a vessel on 12 July 2013; and 4 deceased recovered from a vessel which capsized 16 July 2013. Figures do not include: 5 people believed drowned but not recovered on 20 August 2013.

Graph 1: Boat arrivals by calendar year since 1979 and financial year since 1989–90



Source: the statistics provided in this guide are represented in graph format above.



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